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ABSTRACT

The role of the school board member should not be confined to handling district finances and setting construction and purchasing policy--the "business" aspects of the educational system. The primary role of the school board is not to make the school system more efficient, but rather to make it more effective. To successfully fill this role, board members must ask themselves difficult questions about the educational objectives of their district. For example, how are the schools affecting the minds and spirits of their students? Few educators have dealt with the complex issues raised in the analysis of purpose and objectives. The implications of the recent emphasis on return to basics (the Three R's), for example, have not been thoroughly analyzed. Unless a child enjoys reading and actually engages in this activity, his ability to do so means little by itself. More openness and humanity, as well as more concern for individual growth and development, should characterize education. (Author/DS)

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CRISIS IN THE CLASSROOM,

FIVE YEARS LATER

BY

CHARLES E. SILBERMAN

NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION
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I AM GRATEFUL FOR YOUR INVITATION TO TALK WITH YOU TODAY, FOR SEVERAL REASONS. IF I WERE TO BE COMPLETELY HONEST WITH MYSELF, I SUSPECT I WOULD FIND THAT THE MAJOR REASON IS THAT YOUR INVITATION GAVE ME ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT MY FAVORITE AMERICAN CITY. BUT I AM GRATEFUL, TOO, BECAUSE YOUR INVITATION GAVE ME AN OPPORTUNITY TO TURN AWAY FROM THE SUBJECT OF CRIME, WITH WHICH I HAVE BEEN ENGROSSED THESE PAST FEW YEARS, AND THINK AGAIN ABOUT WHERE AMERICAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE IN THIS BICENTENNIAL YEAR, AND WHERE THEY SHOULD BE HEADING.

WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO DO THIS MORNING, THEREFORE, IS TO PLAY DEVIL'S ADVOCATE WITH YOU -- TO RAISE SOME QUESTIONS AND SHARE SOME CONCERNS I HAVE ABOUT THE SCHOOL SYSTEMS THAT ARE UNDER YOUR STEWARDSHIP.

SINCE SCHOOL-BOARD MEMBERS GENERALLY SEE

THEMSELVES AS MANAGERS. I HAVE TAKEN THE TEXT FOR MY SERMON TODAY FROM THE CLOSEST THING TO HOLY SCRIPTURES I KNOW OF IN THE MANAGEMENT AREA, THE WRITINGS OF PETER F. DRUCKER. (PROFESSOR DRUCKER IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO BE THE LEADING AUTHORITY ON MANAGEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES, IF NOT THE WHOLE FREE WORLD.)

THE MOST FREQUENT EXPLANATION THAT IS GIVEN WHEN SCHOOLS AND OTHER SERVICE INSTITUTIONS FAIL TO PERFORM AS WELL AS WE WOULD LIKE, DRUCKER SUGGESTS IN HIS MONUMENTAL TREATISE, MANAGEMENT, IS THAT SUCH INSTITUTIONS HAVE NOT BEEN MANAGED IN A SUFFICIENTLY BUSINESS-LIKE MANNER; THE REMEDY, IN THIS VIEW, IS FOR MANAGERS TO BEHAVE AS IF THEY WERE BUSINESSMEN. THIS "IS THE WRONG DIAGNOSIS," DRUCKER WRITES, "AND BEING BUSINESS-LIKE IS THE WRONG PRESCRIPTION FOR THE ILLS OF THE SERVICE INSTITUTION. . . . IT IS EFFECTIVENESS AND NOT EFFICIENCY THAT THE SERVICE INSTITUTION LACKS. EFFECTIVENESS CANNOT BE OBTAINED BY BUSINESS-LIKE

BEHAVIOR AS THE TERM IS UNDERSTOOD, THAT IS, BY GREATER EFFICIENCY."

THIS DISTINCTION BETWEEN "EFFICIENCY" AND "EFFECTIVENESS" IS CENTRAL TO DRUCKER'S VIEW OF THE NATURE AND ROLE OF MANAGEMENT. EFFICIENCY MEANS GETTING THINGS DONE THE RIGHT WAY; THE EMPHASIS TENDS TO BE ON PROCEDURE, OFTEN WITH THE IMPLICIT ASSUMPTION THAT THE RIGHT RESULTS WILL BE ACHIEVED AUTOMATICALLY IF THE PROPER PROCEDURES ARE FOLLOWED. EFFECTIVENESS, ON THE OTHER HAND, MEANS GETTING THE RIGHT THINGS DONE.

THE FUNCTION OF MANAGEMENT IS TO BE <u>EFFECTIVE</u> -- MORE PRECISELY, TO MAKE THE ORGANIZATION EFFECTIVE. BUT IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO BE EFFECTIVE UNLESS ONE KNOWS WHAT IT IS THAT ONE WANTS TO ACCOMPLISH -- AND IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO KNOW WHAT ONE WANTS TO ACCOMPLISH UNLESS ONE HAS ASKED, AND KEEPS ASKING, WHAT THE

ORGANIZATION'S GOALS ARE, AND WHAT THEY OUGHT TO BE. THE MAJOR FUNCTION OF THE MANAGER OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM -- OR OF A BUSINESS CORPORATION, A HOSPITAL, A MUSEUM, OR ANY OTHER ORGANIZATION -- IS TO ASK THE UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTIONS THAT OTHERS USUALLY TAKE FOR GRANTED. THE MANAGER NEEDS TO ASK, WHAT ARE WE DOING? MORE IMPORTANT, HE NEEDS TO ASK, WHY ARE WE DOING WHAT WE ARE DOING; WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHAT WE ARE DOING; IS WHAT WE ARE DOING WHAT WE SHOULD BE DOING; IF NOT, WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING? THE FAILURE TO ASK THOSE QUESTIONS, AND KEEP ASKING THEM, IS THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF BUSINESS FAILURE; IT IS ALSO THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF UNSATISFACTORY PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION AND INDEED IN EVERY OTHER SERVICE INSTITUTION.

THIS IS NOT TO SUGGEST THAT EFFICIENCY IS IRRELEVANT; TOO LITTLE CONCERN WITH EFFICIENCY MEANS THAT WE RUN THE RISK OF BEING TRIPPED UP BY SOME SMALL

AND OVERLOOKED DETAIL. "FOR WANT OF A NAIL, THE KINGDOM WAS LOST." BUT TOO MUCH EMPHASIS ON EFFICIENCY IS FAR MORE DANGEROUS, FOR IT TURNS PROCEDURES INTO ENDS RATHER THAN MEANS TO ENDS, NO KINGDOM HAS EVER BEEN WON SIMPLY BECAUSE THE HORSES WERE PROPERLY SHOD. ALL OF US, I AM SURE, CAN THINK OF ANY NUMBER OF INSTANCES IN OUR OWN ORGANIZATIONS -- WHEN WE WERE EMPLOYEES, OF COURSE, RATHER THAN MANAGERS -- WHEN EFFICIENCY WAS GIVEN PRECEDENCE OVER EFFECTIVENESS, WHEN PROCEDURES AND ROUTINES BEGAN TO BE WORSHIPPED AS ENDS, THEREBY PREVENTING US FROM ACHIEVING THE REAL OBJECTIVES.

SOME OF YOU MAY BE WONDERING WHAT ALL THIS HAS TO DO WITH BEING A SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER; THE ANSWER, I SUBMIT, IS THAT IT HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AND ROLE. THE FAILURES OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THIS COUNTRY -- AND IF WE ARE TO BE

HONEST WITH ONE ANOTHER, WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT THERE ARE LARGE FAILURES AS WELL AS GREAT SUCCESSES -- HAVE FAR LESS TO DO WITH EFFICIENCY THAN WITH EFFECTIVENESS. EDUCATORS ARE HUMAN BEINGS, AND WE HAVE THE NORMAL FAILINGS OF THAT SPECIES -- WHICH IS TO SAY THAT ALL OF US TEND TO GET SO CAUGHT UP IN OUR DAY-TO-DAY ROUTINE THAT WE FAIL TO ASK OURSELVES THE HARD AND UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS PURPOSE -- EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE. GIVEN THE SUPERHUMAN PRESSURES PLACED ON SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AS WELL AS ON SUPERINTENDENTS AND OTHER ADMINISTRATORS, AND GIVEN THE UNENDING DEMANDS TO WHICH YOU ALL MUST RESPOND -- USUALLY YESTERDAY RATHER THAN TOMORROW -- IT IS DIFFICULT TO FIND THE TIME TO THINK SERIOUSLY AND DEEPLY ABOUT THE PURPOSES OF EDUCATION, AND ABOUT THE WAYS IN WHICH EDUCATIONAL TECHNIQUES CONTRIBUTE TO THOSE GOALS OR PREVENT THEM FROM BEING

REALIZED. BUT THAT, I SUBMIT, IS WHAT YOUR JOB DEMANDS OF YOU.

IT IS NOT THE WAY MOST SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS CONCEIVE OF THEIR ROLE -- NOR, I SUSPECT, THE WAY MOST SUPERINTENDENTS OF SCHOOL WOULD LIKE TO HAVE YOU THINK. LEST YOU MISUNDERSTAND MY PURPOSE, LET ME EMPHASIZE THAT I AM NOT SUGGESTING THAT WHEN YOU RETURN HOME AFTER THIS CONVENTION, YOU PROCEED TO TAKE OVER THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES OF YOUR SUPERINTENDENT. BUT I AM SUGGESTING THAT YOUR ROLE SHOULD NOT BE LIMITED TO FINANCE OR LOGISTICS OR CONSTRUCTION OR PURCHASING PRACTICES.

YOUR PRIMARY ROLE, I SUBMIT, IS NOT TO MAKE YOUR SCHOOL SYSTEM MORE EFFICIENT, IMPORTANT AS THAT MAY BE IN THIS ERA OF AUSTERITY AND RETRENCHMENT, BUT TO MAKE IT MORE EFFECTIVE. AND THAT MEANS ASKING HARD QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT IT IS THAT YOUR SCHOOL

SYSTEM IS DOING, WHY IT IS DOING IT, WHAT THE CONSEQUENCES ARE, AND WHAT IT SHOULD BE DOING IN ADDITION TO -- OR INSTEAD OF -- WHAT IT IS NOW DOING. YOUR JOB, IN A SENSE, IS TO PLAY DEVIL'S ADVOCATE WITH THE EDUCATORS WHO RUN YOUR SCHOOL SYSTEM, MUCH AS I AM DOING WITH YOU TODAY.

LET ME SUGGEST THE KINDS OF QUESTIONS I WOULD LIKE TO SEE YOU ASK, AND THE KINDS OF ANSWERS I WOULD HOPE YOU AND THE EDUCATORS WITH WHOM YOU WORK WILL DEVELOP. THE FIRST QUESTION IS ONE TO WHICH, I SUSPECT, NO IMMEDIATE ANSWER WILL BE FORTHCOMING -- BUT ONE THAT SHOULD BE ASKED PERIODICALLY UNTIL IT CAN BE ANSWERED; WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM MAKE? IN WHAT WAYS DO STUDENTS WHO HAVE GONE THROUGH OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM DIFFER FROM THE PRODUCTS OF OTHER SCHOOL SYSTEMS? IN SHORT, WHAT, IF ANYTHING, IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM; IN WHAT WAYS,

IF ANY, ARE WE AFFECTING THE MINDS AND SPIRITS OF OUR STUDENTS?

SINCE I DO NOT THINK YOU WILL GET MUCH OF AN ANSWER FROM THAT QUESTION, OR SET OF QUESTIONS -- MY WIFE AND I FOUND ONLY A HANDFUL OF SUPERINTENDENTS OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS WHO HAD EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT IT -- LET ME SUGGEST A SOMEWHAT EASIER QUESTION: WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES OF THE EDUCATION OFFERED BY YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT.

LET ME SUGGEST WHAT I HOPE WILL BE THE ANSWER. THE MAJOR PURPOSE OF EDUCATION, I SUBMIT, SHOULD BE TO EDUCATE EDUCATORS, WHICH IS TO SAY, TO TURN OUT MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE ABLE TO EDUCATE THEMSELVES, WHO HAVE THE DESIRE AND THE CAPACITY TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN EDUCATION, AND WHO ARE LIKELY, THEREFORE, TO BE NOT JUST YEAR-ROUND BUT LIFE-LONG, SELF-DIRECTED LEARNERS. "BEING EDUCATED," AS MY FRIEND, DAVID HAWKINS

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, HAS WRITTEN, "MEANS NO LONGER NEEDING A TEACHER." OR AS SIR ALEC CLEGG, ONE OF THE GREAT CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH EDUCATORS, PUTS IT, THE OBJECT OF EDUCATION "IS NOT SO MUCH TO CONVEY KNOWLEDGE AS IT IS TO EXCITE A DETERMINATION IN THE CHILD TO ACQUIRE IT FOR HIMSELF, AND TO TEACH HIM HOW TO GO ABOUT ACQUIRING IT."

THE MOST INFLUENTIAL CHILD PSYCHOLOGIST OF MODERN TIMES, JEAN PIAGET, PUTS IT IN AN EVER BROADER CONTEXT. "THE PRINCIPAL GOAL OF EDUCATION," HE INSISTS, "IS TO CREATE MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE CAPABLE OF DOING NEW THINGS, NOT SIMPLY OF REPEATING WHAT OTHER GENERATIONS HAVE DONE -- MEN AND WOMEN WHO ARE CREATIVE, INVENTIVE, AND DISCOVERERS", WHO "HAVE MINDS WHICH CAN BE CRITICAL, CAN VERIFY, AND NOT ACCEPT EVERYTHING THEY ARE OFFERED."

NOTHING LESS THAN THIS WILL DO. THE CHILDREN

WHO WILL ENTER SCHOOL NEXT SEPTEMBER WILL STILL BE IN THE LABOR FORCE IN THE YEAR 2036; WE CANNOT EVEN IMAGINE WHAT SOCIETY WILL BE LIKE THEN, LET ALONE WHAT KINDS OF JOBS THEY MAY HAVE. IF WE DO NO MORE THAN TRAIN THEM TO FILL THE EXISTING SLOTS IN SOCIETY -- IF OUR EMPHASIS IS ON SO-CALLED "CAREER EDUCATION", THE NEW EUPHEMISM FOR OLD-FASHIONED VOCATIONAL EDUCATION -- WE WILL CRIPPLE THEM FOR EFFECTIVE LIVES IN THE 21ST CENTURY. WE MUST REMEMBER, AS ONE EDUCATOR HAS PUT IT, THAT YOU CANNOT MEMORIZE THE FUTURE. <u>YOU CANNOT MEMORIZE THE FUTURE.</u>

WE CAN HELP STUDENTS PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE, HOWEVER, BY MAKING SURE THAT THEY DEVELOP THE CAPACITY TO EDUCATE THEMSELVES -- BY NURTURING IN THEM A SENSE OF COMPETENCE, A SENSE OF BEING ACTORS AS WELL AS SPECTATORS, OF BEING PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE COMPETENCE AND THE KNOWLEDGE AND THE DESIRE TO SHAPE THEIR

ENVIRONMENT, AND NOT SIMPLY BE PASSIVELY SHAPED BY IT.

THIS VIEW OF THE PURPOSES OF EDUCATION HAS PROFOUND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CURRICULUM. IT MEANS A HIGH PRIORITY FOR THE THREE R'S, FOR THE "DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS AND ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE", OF COURSE. BUT IT MEANS A HIGHER PRIORITY FOR CHILDREN'S ABILITY -- AND THEIR DESIRE -- TO USE THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE THEY DEVELOP AND ACQUIRE. WHEN I VISITED A PARTICULARLY EXCITING SCHOOL IN A LONDON SLUM SOME YEARS AGO, I ASKED THE HEADMISTRESS ABOUT HER STUDENTS' READING SCORES; HER ANSWER HAS HAUNTED ME EVER SINCE. "I WILL SHOW THE READING SCORES, OF COURSE," SHE ANSWERED, "BUT AFTER YOU HAVE SEEN THEM, WHAT WILL YOU KNOW? IF I TURN OUT A GENERATION OF STUDENTS WHO HAVE THE ABILITY TO READ, BUT WHO DO NOT READ, OR WHO READ NOTHING BUT THE TABLOIDS, I SHALL HAVE FAILED. I WANT TO EDUCATE A GENERATION THAT LOVES TO READ AND THAT CAN EXERCISE

TASTE AND DISCRIMINATION IN WHAT IT READS! I WANT TO EDUCATE STUDENTS WHO ENJOY POETRY AND DRAMA AND GREAT NOVELS -- AND ART AND MUSIC AND DANCE AS WELL."

THE LESSON IS CLEAR: WE MUST ATTACH GREAT IMPORTANCE TO CHILDREN'S LEARNING HOW TO READ -- BUT WE SHOULD ATTACH EQUAL IMPORTANCE TO SUCH QUESTIONS AS: DO CHILDREN ENJOY READING? DO THEY IN FACT READ? WHAT SORTS OF BOOKS DO THEY READ?

THE SAME IS TRUE FOR THE OTHER TWO R'S. WE SHOULD ASK NOT SIMPLY WHETHER STUDENTS KNOW HOW TO WRITE, BUT WHETHER STUDENTS ENJOY WRITING, AND HOW MUCH THEY WRITE, AND WHAT KINDS OF WRITING THEY DO. AND WE SHOULD ASK WHETHER STUDENTS ENJOY MATHEMATICS, WHETHER THEY KNOW HOW TO THINK MATHEMATICALLY, WHETHER THEY APPLY THEIR MATHEMATICAL KNOWLEDGE OUTSIDE THE MATH PERIOD ITSELF.

THIS MAY SOUND SELF-EVIDENT. YET, ALL TOO OFTEN,

WE MANAGE TO CONVERT THOSE INQUISITIVE, ACTIVE LEARNERS WHO ENTER SCHOOL AT AGE FIVE OR SIX INTO YOUNGSTERS WHO, AT LEAST WHILE THEY ARE IN SCHOOL, APPEAR TO BE PASSIVE, APATHETIC, SOMETIMES DOCILE AND SOMETIMES HOSTILE NON-LEARNERS. STUDENTS WHO BEGIN SCHOOL EAGER TO LEARN ARE RAPIDLY TURNED OFF FROM LEARNING, AND SO THEY FAIL TO DEVELOP THE CAPACITY TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR, AND TO DIRECT, THEIR OWN LEARNING -- OR FOR THAT MATTER, THEIR OWN BEHAVIOR.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON, I SUBMIT, IS THE WAY WE ORGANIZE OUR CLASSROOMS, AND THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT THE CURRICULUM THEY CONTAIN. THE WAY IN WHICH THE CONVENTIONAL CLASSROOM IS ORGANIZED IMPLIES THAT THE TEACHER IS THE SOURCE OF ALL KNOWLEDGE, THE PERSON WHO DECIDES <u>WHEN</u> LEARNING WILL START AND <u>WHEN</u> IT WILL

STOP. EDUCATION IS CONCEIVED OF AS THE ONE-WAY TRANSMISSION OF INFORMATION FROM TEACHER TO STUDENTS, NOT AS AN ACTIVE PROCESS; ONE TEACHER WHOSE CLASSROOM WE OBSERVED, IN FACT, HAD A SIGN IN HIS ROOM THAT MADE THIS VIEW EXPLICIT. THE SIGN READ, "AVAILABLE - FREE - KNOWLEDGE - MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY, 9 TO 3 - BRING YOUR OWN CONTAINERS" -- AS IF STUDENTS WERE SIMPLY EMPTY VESSELS TO BE FILLED. IF THE SIGN WAS UNUSUAL, THE ATTITUDE WAS NOT.

WE TURN KIDS OFF FROM LEARNING IN OTHER WAYS -- FOR EXAMPLE, BY THE KINDS OF RULES WE ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN -- MOST PARTICULARLY BY THE INANE INSISTENCE THAT STUDENTS SIT SILENTLY AND MOTIONLESS THE ENTIRE SCHOOL DAY, A RULE THAT IS UTTERLY FOREIGN TO THE NATURE OF CHILDREN, OR FOR THAT MATTER, TO ADULTS AS WELL. WHEN I TESTIFIED BEFORE A SENATE COMMITTEE, THE STAFF DIRECTOR CALLED ME ANY NUMBER OF TIMES BEFORE

I WENT UP TO THE HILL TO REMIND ME THAT MY WRITTEN TESTIMONY COULD RUN AS LONG AS I WANTED, BUT TO PLEASE, PLEASE, NOT LET MY ORAL TESTIMONY RUN MORE THAN FIFTEEN MINUTES, BECAUSE THE SENATORS WOULD BEGIN TO FIDGET, AND WOULD WANT TO ASK QUESTIONS. I DON'T THINK THAT THAT IS ANY CRITICISM OF THE SENATORS; YOU WILL BEGIN TO FIDGET IF I RUN ON TOO LONG -- ALTHOUGH I HAVE FOUND THAT MOST AUDIENCES HAVE AN ATTENTION SPAN TWICE AS LONG AS THE SENATORS'. AND YET WE SOMEHOW ASSUME THAT CHILDREN, OR ADOLESCENTS, WILL SIT SILENTLY AND MOTIONLESS FOR FORTY OR FIFTY MINUTES AT A TIME, ALL DAY LONG.

WE DESTROY CHILDREN'S DESIRE TO LEARN BY THE MINDLESS CURRICULUM WE INFLICT ON THEM AS WELL -- BY THE OBSESSION WITH NAMES AND DATES AND SO-CALLED FACTS UNRELATED TO ANY IDEAS OR CONCEPTS, AND BY THE FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE WHAT WE ALL KNOW AS ADULTS, THAT

LEARNING IS LIKELY TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE IF IT GROWS OUT OF WHAT INTERESTS US AS WELL AS WHAT INTERESTS OUR TEACHER. A FRIEND WHOSE GRANDCHILD WAS VISITING HER LAST CHRISTMAS DISCOVERED THAT THE YOUNGSTER HATED SCIENCE. CURIOUS ABOUT THE REASON, SHE ASKED HIM, "WHAT IS SCIENCE?" THE CHILD ANSWERED WITH THE CONTEMPT CHILDREN SHOW WHEN ADULTS ASK THE OBVIOUS: "OH, SCIENCE IS FILLING IN THE LINES." WHEN MY YOUNGEST SON HEARD ME TELL THE STORY FOR THE FIRST TIME, HE ADDED, "THAT'S WHAT SOCIAL STUDIES IS, TOO, DADDY."

WE DESTROY STUDENTS' DESIRE TO LEARN, TOO, BY THE KINDS OF PUNISHMENT WE USE. WHEN STUDENTS ARE PUNISHED BY BEING KEPT AFTER SCHOOL, OR BY BEING REQUIRED TO READ AN EXTRA ASSIGNMENT, WE ARE TELLING THEM THAT SCHOOL IS SO UNPLEASANT, THAT READING AND LEARNING ARE SO PAINFUL, THAT THE WORST THING WE

CAN DO TO THEM IS TO GIVE THEM MORE OF IT!

BUT WE DO WORSE THAN THAT! ANOTHER MAJOR PURPOSE OF EDUCATION SHOULD BE TO DEVELOP SELF-RELIANT, INDEPENDENT, AUTONOMOUS HUMAN BEINGS -- TO DEVELOP MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE THE DESIRE AND THE CAPACITY TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN BEHAVIOR AS WELL AS FOR THEIR OWN LEARNING. MOST SCHOOLS, I AM SAD TO REPORT, SUBVERT DISCIPLINE RATHER THAN DEVELOP IT. FOR DISCIPLINE -- TRUE DISCIPLINE -- IS NOT THE CAPACITY TO BEHAVE "PROPERLY" WHILE BEING WATCHED; IT IS THE CAPACITY TO BEHAVE THE SAME WAY WHETHER ONE IS WATCHED OR NOT. MOST SCHOOLS DESTROY DISCIPLINE IN THIS SENSE; FOR WHEN STUDENTS ARE ALWAYS BEING WATCHED, WHEN THEY ARE NEVER GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY, TO MAKE CHOICES, TO MAKE MISTAKES (FOR WE ALL KNOW, AS ADULTS, HOW OFTEN WE HAVE LEARNED FROM OUR OWN MISTAKES), IT IS UNREASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT THEY WILL DEVELOP INTO RESPONSIBLE HUMAN BEINGS.

FOR STUDENTS TO LEARN TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR LEARNING OR THEIR BEHAVIOR, THERE MUST BE TRUST -- TRUST IN STUDENTS' DESIRE TO LEARN, TRUST IN THEIR CAPACITY TO LEARN THROUGH THEIR OWN EXPLORATIONS, AND TRUST IN THEIR CAPACITY FOR GROWTH AND FULFILLMENT. WITHOUT SUCH TRUST, TEACHERS WILL NOT FEEL FREE TO PERMIT STUDENTS TO MAKE CHOICES, TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY -- AND PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANT, TO MAKE MISTAKES AND TO LEARN FROM THOSE MISTAKES.

ANOTHER KIND OF TRUST IS EQUALLY INDISPENSABLE: -- TRUST IN THE INDIVIDUAL CLASSROOM TEACHER. UNLESS TEACHERS RECEIVE TRUST AND RESPECT FROM ADMINISTRATORS, PARENTS, AND SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS, THEY WILL FEEL UNABLE TO ENCOURAGE THEIR STUDENTS' EXPLORATION.

IT SHOULD BE CLEAR BY NOW THAT I AM NOT -- REPEAT NOT -- CALLING FOR A "RETURN TO BASICS", OR "FUNDAMENTALS", OR WHATEVER THE EUPHEMISM IS FOR THE GROWING

CALL FOR SCHOOL SYSTEMS TO TURN THE CLOCK BACK TO SOME IDYLLIC - BUT WHOLLY IMAGINARY - PAST IN WHICH ALL STUDENTS LEARNED TO READ FLUENTLY AND TO WRITE EFFORTLESS PROSE. THERE NEVER WAS SUCH A TIME; IF SCHOOLS SEEMED MORE EFFECTIVE IN THE PAST, IT WAS BECAUSE THEIR FAILURES DROPPED OUT AT THE END OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, OR IN A LATER PERIOD, AT THE END OF JUNIOR HIGH. INDEED, THE CURRICULUM OFFERED IN MOST JUNIOR HIGHS IS AT BEST A MODIFICATION OF THE PROGRAM DEVELOPED IN AN ERA WHEN IT WAS ASSUMED THAT FOR MOST STUDENTS, THE NINTH GRADE WOULD BE THE END OF FORMAL SCHOOLING.

LET US NOT FOOL OURSELVES, THEREFORE, BY PRETENDING THAT WE CAN SOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF THE MOMENT BY RETURNING TO THE PAST -- TO EDUCATIONAL METHODS THAT WERE ABANDONED BECAUSE OF THEIR ALL-TOO-EVIDENT FAILURES. IF SAT SCORES ARE DECLINING, OR IF HIGH

SCHOOLS ARE TURNING OUT GRADUATES WHO CAN NEITHER READ NOR WRITE, IT CANNOT BE BECAUSE THESE STUDENTS WERE EXPOSED TO SO-CALLED OPEN EDUCATION; THE PLAIN FACT IS THAT THERE ARE ONLY A RELATIVE HANDFUL OF OPEN CLASSROOMS IN THE UNITED STATES, AND THAT THEY ARE LIMITED ALMOST ENTIRELY TO THE LOWER ELEMENTARY GRADES. MOREOVER, SUCH CLASSROOMS DID NOT BEGIN TO DEVELOP IN THIS COUNTRY UNTIL THE LATE 1960s. THOSE WHO BLAME THE FAILURES OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS ON OPEN EDUCATION, OR "PERMISSIVENESS", OR PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION, HAVE CONVENIENTLY FORGOTTEN THAT THESE SAME CRITICISMS HAVE BEEN LEVELLED AT THE SCHOOLS BEFORE -- FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE LATE 1940s AND EARLY 1950s. INDEED, THE EDUCATIONAL REFORMS OF THE 1950s AND 1960s WERE DOMINATED BY THE SEARCH FOR MORE INTELLECTUAL RIGOR AND HIGHER ACADEMIC STANDARDS; THE LAUNCHING OF SPUTNICK, YOU MAY RECALL, CREATED FEARS THAT WE WERE LOSING THE INTELLECTUAL AND ACADEMIC RACE WITH THE

SOVIET UNION. THE INTEREST IN MORE INFORMAL, OPEN APPROACHES TO EDUCATION THAT BEGAN IN THE LATE 1960s, AND THAT WAS BOTH REFLECTED IN AND STIMULATED BY CRISIS IN THE CLASSROOM, GREW OUT OF THE REALIZATION THAT THE TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO EDUCATION NOT ONLY WERE NOT WORKING, BUT WERE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE.

THESE CHANGES -- TOWARD MORE OPENNESS AND HUMANITY, AND MORE CONCERN FOR INDIVIDUAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT -- ARE BOUND TO CONTINUE, DESPITE OCCASIONAL SETBACKS. THEY WILL CONTINUE BECAUSE THEY ARE MORE EFFECTIVE IN ACHIEVING THE MAJOR GOALS OF EDUCATION, AND BECAUSE THEY REFLECT BROAD AND DEEP-ROOTED CHANGES IN AMERICAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE.

LET ME CONCLUDE, THEREFORE, WITH THESE CONTEMPORARY-SOUNDING WORDS FROM THE FATHER OF THE COMMON SCHOOL, THE GREAT 19TH CENTURY EDUCATOR HORACE MANN. "TO ALL DOUBTERS, DISBELIEVERS, OR DESPAIRERS IN HUMAN PROGRESS,"

MANN WROTE IN 1848, "THERE IS ONE EXPERIMENT WHICH HAS NEVER YET BEEN TRIED . . . EDUCATION HAS NEVER BEEN BROUGHT TO BEAR WITH ONE-HUNDREDTH PART OF ITS POTENTIAL FORCE UPON THE NATURES OF CHILDREN, AND THROUGH THEM, UPON THE CHARACTER OF MEN."

IT IS ABOUT TIME WE TRIED THAT EXPERIMENT.

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